

ATROCITIES OF WAR.*

BY

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VAE VICTIS! It is difficult to conceive a shorter sentence that contains so much meaning. Woe to the vanquished! The modern term, Atrocities, or Horrors, has an alarming signification in Christian countries where men are exhorted to love their enemies!

The Old Testament abounds in descriptions of atrocities practised on prisoners of war. We are all familiar with one striking example in which the first King of Israel, Saul, showed mildness to the vanquished Amalekites, and the dramatic reproof he sustained when the prophet Samuel hewed Agag, King of the Amalekites, in pieces for sacrificial purposes.

When the mighty captain Joab took Rabbah, the metropolis of the Ammonites, he wisely sent for David to decide the fate of the garrison and be responsible for the atrocities. After Joab had brought forth the spoil of the city in great abundance, the inhabitants were collected, and he put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln (2 Sam. xii, 31). This was done not only to the people of Rabbah, but also to the inhabitants of other Ammonite cities. This method of treating prisoners of war was not peculiar to the Israelites. The slaughter and torture of the vanquished regularly followed the capture of strongholds in those days. The date of some of these conquests and wars can now be fixed. After the discovery of the remarkable slabs, cylinders, and tablets of Assyria, enthusiastic and clever men set themselves the task of deciphering the peculiar cuneiform inscriptions so common on these monuments, and from them much has been learned regarding military, social, and religious matters connected with the powerful nations surrounding the Kingdom of Israel. Moreover, the evidence now available shows that the severe punishment inflicted by David on the Ammonites was the common sequel to the capture and sack of a citadel.

Modern civilization has taught men to respect brave enemies, but this was not practised during the pre-eminence of Babylonia and Assyria.

The greatest and most powerful monarch of Assyria was Ashur-nasir-pal (B.C. 885-860). The chief source of information concerning his reign is the long cuneiform inscription on slabs which formed the pavement of the entrance to the temple of "Ninib" at Nimrud; and on the colossal human-headed bulls, and lions, excavated by Layard and now exhibited in the British Museum.

Ashur-nasir-pal had the walls of his palace, and the temple he built in the city of Calah (Nimrud), covered with records of his conquests, and strings of titles descriptive of his greatness and power. It is the description of the atrocities inflicted on the people conquered by Ashur-nasir-pal that concerns us most. The records of the eighteen years of his reign show that there was scarcely a year in which he was not at war. The way in which prisoners were treated is briefly set out in regard to the fortified city of Tela. After its capture, 3,000 fighting men were slain; their goods, oxen, and sheep carried away, and many captives burned with fire. Many soldiers were

taken alive. The hands and feet of some were cut off; of others the nose, ears and fingers. The eyes of many men were put out. One heap was made of the living, and another of heads. The heads of some were bound to vines round about the city. The young and maidens were burned in the fire, and the city was annihilated.

As an example of Ashur-nasir-pal's vengeance the following is a good example:

The city of Suru revolted and killed the governor. The King collected chariots and hosts and took the city. He built a pillar near the city gate and flayed all the chief men and covered the pillar with their skins. To be flayed alive is a horrible form of punishment, and it is difficult to conceive the kind of crime that fits it. Boys and men learn from Ovid that Marsyas, the Phrygian flute-player, was flayed alive for presumption. Although he repented because he did not think that playing on Minerva's reed deserved such vengeance:

Apollo from his body stript his hide.

His body was one wound, blood every way

Streamed from all parts: his sinews naked lay

His bare veins pant: his heart you might behold. (*Sandys.*)

A few years ago I interested myself in African drums, and ascertained that some fetish drums were covered with human skin. I got no proof that the skin was removed from living bodies.

Recently, in the Natural History Museum at Nantes, I had an opportunity of looking at the tanned skin of a soldier, killed by the Vendéans in 1793; he requested his comrades to have a drum covered with his skin, so that he might continue to be a terror to those "brigands de royalistes" after his death.

In the Nineveh Gallery of the British Museum there are bas-reliefs representing an assault on a fortified city by Assyrian soldiers. One of the slabs shows how badly the vanquished suffered at the hands of their conquerors. The heads of the prisoners, and probably of the slain, were cut off and presented to the King, much in the same way that big game hunters collect the heads of slaughtered beasts as evidence of their skill and courage.

The heads of the slain represented on the bas-relief (Fig. 1) have marked Jewish features (Museum Guide). It is probable that the atrocities

perpetrated by the Hebrews on the Ammonites were no worse than the punishments and atrocities inflicted on them when in turn they did not happen to be victorious. Saul committed suicide after the disastrous defeat at Gilboa for fear the enemy should abuse him. The Philistines cut off his head and fastened his body and the bodies of his three sons to the walls of Beth-shan.

In those ancient times a king who went to war was glorified in the eyes of his subjects by the number of the enemy slain in battle. This is well expressed in the familiar couplet: "Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands." The history of the ancient civilizations of Palestine, Babylonia, and Assyria and the neighbouring countries makes it certain that atrocities did not end with the capture of a city. The inhabitants of the conquered countries suffered cruelly, and there are good reasons for the opinion that many horrible atrocities, perpetrated on captive Jews, were intensified by hatred of the Jewish religion, which differed so materially from the idolatrous worship of Ashur and Ishtar in Nineveh. Every country has its own religion, and the Jews clung to their religion with remarkable tenacity.

Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), King of Syria, endeavoured (B.C. 150) to suppress Judaism, and established the worship



FIG. 1.—Bringing in the heads of the slain. Assyrian bas-relief. British Museum.

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of Greek gods at Jerusalem. Women were terribly punished for allowing their boys to be circumcised. The most horrible form of mutilation on record is that inflicted on seven brethren in the presence of their mother, in one day, because they refused to eat pork (2 Macc. vii). The tyranny of Antiochus IV led to the Maccabean rebellion.

At the period when Ashur-nasir-pal inflicted such ferocious punishments on the people he conquered by force of arms, Assyria had reached not only a state of great prosperity but a high civilization. A neighbouring country, Egypt, had not only attained a higher civilization but practised similar atrocities on a grander scale; there are pictorial records of the atrocities which may be read and studied by any intelligent tourist who makes a journey to Luxor, on the Nile. Ramses III was a king as vain of his conquests as Ashur-nasir-pal. He reigned in Egypt about 1100 B.C., and conquered the Libyans in two great battles. His reign was afterwards a period of peace and quiet, and Ramses became a great builder of temples and worshipped especially the Theban Amon. He built a large temple on the western bank of the Nile at Thebes. The place is now known as Medinét Habu. The temple, about 500 feet long and 160 feet wide, stands in a conspicuous position about half a mile from the Memnon Colossi. The sculptures, wall-pictures, and hieroglyphics record the King's campaigns against the Libyans, the Syrians, and the negroes. They are of importance for the history of Egypt and Mediterranean lands. The figures in the pictures, cut into or painted on the walls, are almost life-size, except that of Pharaoh, who is represented as a giant fighting and trampling on his foes. The scenes of the mutilation of prisoners show the methods. On one wall the captors are engaged cutting off the hands and feet of the captives. The heaps of amputated hands and feet are depicted, and scribes record the numbers, like clerks checking goods in a merchant's office (Fig. 2). The severed limbs numbered 12,535.

This method of removing hands and feet was practised in the Sudan as late as 1890. Father Ohrwalder was a captive in the Mahdi's camp ten years (1882-1892); he wrote an account of his captivity, and the brutality practised at Omdurman. Thieves were punished by removal of the right hand and the left foot. The loss of the hand hampers him in thieving, and the removal of the foot hinders him in running away. The amputations were performed by a butcher. A cord was tied round the forearm just above the wrist, and the hand was dexterously detached with a knife. The stump was then dipped in boiling oil or fat, and then smeared with a mixture of tar and grease. In about two months the wound healed. The foot was removed at the ankle in a similar way. Some died from the shock of the amputation, and a few later from secondary complications. Ohrwalder mentions that many recovered, for there was an enormous number of cripples in Omdurman.

In 1898 I had an opportunity of examining a spy at Luxor who had been punished in this way by the Khalifa. He was released when Kitchener's troops occupied Dongola. The cut surfaces had slowly granulated. The styloid processes of the radius and ulna and the malleoli were covered with thin scar tissue.

Thieves seem to have been treated with more consideration than prisoners of war. In the case of a thief, when his hand or foot was cut off the bleeding was checked by the ancient plan of dipping the stump in boiling oil. This privilege did not apply to captives taken in battle, and many bled to death.

In some parts of Africa (Uganda) mutilation is dreaded because the people believe that in the next world their ghosts will be similarly maimed. A man whose hand is cut off believes that his ghost will bear the stigma of a thief. There is no evidence that the ancient Egyptians believed in such fancies. Though religious they were practical, and often removed the genital organs of prisoners of war, for an obvious reason. On one of the walls at Medinét Habu soldiers are represented in the performance of this mutilation. The proceedings are drawn with the same realism as operations in a book on operative surgery. The victim is held down; the knees bent and the legs drawn aside by assistants, whilst the operator standing between the limbs removes the external genitals with a knife. He makes a curvilinear incision on each side and then sweeps off penis, scrotum, and testicles and casts them in a heap as in the case of hands and feet. Prisoners tied in line, like cattle arranged for slaughter, await their turn. There was method in treating prisoners of war in this way. Many died. The survivors, minus hand or foot, were useless as soldiers, and, without genitals, useless for propagation.

The hands and feet and other severed parts, after being counted and recorded, were dedicated to Amon, or to Khons, in the temple, from the same motives that we hang captured flags and banners in conspicuous places in our cathedrals.

The pictures in this temple interested me in 1898, because a similar act had been performed within a few hundred miles of this temple as recently as 1896, when the Abyssinians inflicted a crushing defeat on the Italian forces in the hills north of Adowa (Adua). After the battle a number of prisoners were treated in the same way as the soldiers of Ramses III treated the unfortunate Libyan captives

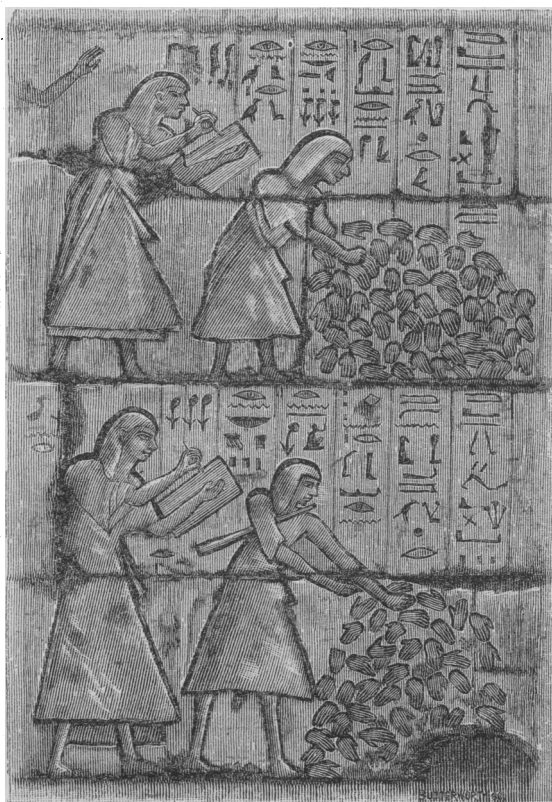


FIG. 2.—Scene from a wall of the temple at Medinét Habu, showing scribes recording the number of hands cut from prisoners of war. (From a photograph.)

some three thousand years previously.

The effects of the atrocities on the Italian soldiers were carefully described by Dr. T. Fiaschi, surgeon to the Sydney Hospital, New South Wales. Fiaschi went to the assistance of his countrymen at the hospital of Asmara, Abyssinia. The Abyssinian soldiers cut off with swords the right hand and left foot of the captured men. Many bled to death because the stumps were not allowed to be dipped "in boiling melted butter." Some of the native Mohammedans who were thus mutilated in despair drowned themselves in a water-hole. Some bandaged the stumps with strips of clothing, and were eventually rescued by their wives. Later, when hospital help was available, the condition of many sufferers was improved by secondary amputation performed by Italian surgeons. Fiaschi found that the forearm stump as a rule healed naturally. The leg stump required reamputation, save in a few instances where the soldiers, in cutting off the foot, had hacked off the malleoli. He estimates that of 1,500 black soldiers mutilated at Adowa 500 survived; the remaining 1,000 died from haemorrhage, starvation, and suffering. Removal of the genitals was not so freely practised on the living as removal of hands and feet.

Many of the sufferers among the white soldiers were privates or petty officers. This kind of mutilation was done mainly by the Gallas—Abyssinian irregular mounted horsemen, brave men but notorious for cruelty in war.

Fiaschi's descriptions of the methods employed in mutilating the prisoners of war, wounded and unwounded, black and white, corresponds with those depicted on the walls of the temple at Medinet Habu. The object of the mutilation by the Gallas was to take the parts removed to their women. The Gallas rode about with these disgusting trophies transfixed on their spears. The greater number of the dead were eviscerated. It is well known that men can survive the complete removal of the external genitalia even when it is carried out in the rude fashion depicted on the walls of the temple at Medinet Habu.

A religious sect in Russia known as Skopski practise complete removal of the external genitals of the male as an initiation ceremony. The act is known as the Royal Seal. This extraordinary sect was founded by Andrew Selivanof (died 1832), and the initiation ceremony of removing the external organs of generation is founded on the famous argument on divorce. "For there are some eunuchs which were so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake" (Matt. xix, 12). That the Skopski remove the male genitalia completely is proved by a specimen in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, showing the effect on the prostate of this curious religious act. Religious enthusiasts in England occasionally endeavour to make themselves eunuchs, but attempts at self-castration are rarely successful.

MUTILATION OF THE CORPSE.

To murder a person and dismember the dead body from sheer hate is a practice repugnant to most minds, but it is widespread and a common mode of expressing contempt and hatred. The treatment of Guy Fawkes and his co-conspirators shows that the State endorsed the mutilation of the bodies of traitors. After these men were hanged, their heads were cut off, the bodies drawn and quartered, and the heads set up on the gates of the city—for the rooks and crows.

Tyburn gallows stood near the Marble Arch, and I have often looked at the rook that perch and build in the tall trees in Connaught Square hard by the tablet that marks the spot where the gallows stood, and wondered if they are descended from the rooks that may have pecked out the eyes of Perkin Warbeck, Jack Sheppard, Jonathan Wild, and the like; or sniffed the skeletons of Cromwell and Ireton when they were exhumed and hung on the gibbets.

Whilst expressing horror at atrocities committed by Turks, infidels, and savages on the quick and the dead, it is worth mention that early in the fifteenth century the Welsh under Glendower committed atrocities on English soldiers. Shakespeare represents the Earl of Westmoreland informing Henry IV of these facts in unmistakable terms:

There came
A post from Wales laden with heavy news;
Whose worst was, that the noble Mortimer,
Leading the men of Hereford to fight
Against the irregular and wild Glendower,
Was by the rude hands of the Welshman taken,
And a thousand of his people butchered;
Upon whose dead corpse there was such misuse
Such beastly shameless transformation,
By those Welshwomen done, as may not be
Without much shame, retold or spoken of.

Even as late as the Wars of the Roses it was a common saying—

Priests pray for enemies, princes kill.

Certainly they cut off the heads of important men slain in battle and exhibited them. The Earl of Salisbury revolted against Henry IV, and lost his life. The gory head of the earl was welcomed into London by a procession of

abbots and bishops, who went out singing psalms and thanksgiving to meet it.

For civilized countries respect for the dead body is almost a fetish. The corpses of royal persons, and the rich, are often wrapped in lead and encased in polished oak. The bodies of common mortals are put in coffins made of elm, because it is cheap and withstands water better than other kinds of wood. In the formal Christian burial service we read, "though worms destroy the body," yet with singular perversion coffins are, as a rule, buried beyond the depth at which earthworms flourish.

The frequency with which man, savage and civilized, mutilates his enemy, in frenzy and in spite, is part of his animal nature. Here is a curious example from otters:

FRACTURE OF THE OS PENIS OR BACULUM.

Many mammals, especially the carnivorous, have a bone in the penis. It is also present in squirrels. Oldfield Thomas noticed that the os penis in squirrels shows such striking differences in the various species that he finds it a more reliable guide in classifying the members of this difficult family than their teeth. He thinks it is more convenient to call this bone the baculum—a little stick.

Otters have a bone in the penis, and the two divergent knobs are invested with the reflexion of the prepuce which covers the glans. The end of the urethra emerges in the interspace of what may for convenience be called the terminal condyles of the bone (Fig. 3).

Mr. Gerald Uthwatt, a keen otter-hunter, collected the "penis bone" of otters for a hobby, and noticed, not infrequently, that the bone is broken and healed. It is difficult to account for such fractures unless we know the habits of these animals. When male otters fight, each combatant tries to seize the external genitals (cods) of its adversary. Otters possess powerful jaws and sharp teeth, and their ability to break the baculum, notwithstanding its hardness, need not be a matter for surprise. A similar fracture has been observed in a seal. T. N. Arnold shot a seal in the Caspian Sea. The baculum of the animal had been broken, but the fragments had firmly united. The bone had been broken at a spot corresponding to that in the otter. S. Alpheraky sent a short account of the specimen and a drawing, to the Zoological Society, London. He found it difficult to offer an explanation of the cause of the injury. Surely male seals are as quarrelsome as otters! This is a mild atrocity of war compared with the awful vengeance man suffers at the hand of man!

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THE SPREAD OF INFLUENZA IN AN INDUSTRIAL AREA.

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EXCEPTIONAL opportunities have perhaps been afforded for making the observations set forth in this paper, both by reason of certain characteristics of the neighbourhood and by reason of the temporary shortage of medical men; and because a similar opportunity might not early arise again, these observations are placed on record.

The area in which they were made contains a population of about 11,000, mainly drawn from the artisan class, and while being a portion of Halifax, it is separated from the town proper by a deep ravine in which runs a railway and small river; a bridge forms the only main connexion with the town.